

Message Text

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ACTION INR-07

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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1728

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TOKYO 12566

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: XB, XP, UR, MPOL, JA

SUBJECT: JAPANESE PERCEPTIONS OF SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE

REF: STATE 187519

SUMMARY: FOLLOWING RESPONSE TO REFTEL INQUIRY ON JAPANESE REACTION TO INCREASED SOVIET NAVAL ACTIVITY IN PACIFIC INDICATES CONCERN IN DEFENSE-MINDED QUARTERS, BUT ONLY SPORADIC FLURRIES OF ENHANCED PUBLIC INTEREST AND LITTLE AFFECT TO DATE ON JAPANESE DEFENSE POLICY. END SUMMARY.

1. CONSISTENT WITH DISTRUST OF RUSSIA THAT PERMEATES MODERN JAPANESE HISTORY, JAPANESE EVER SINCE WORLD WAR II HAVE REGARDED THE SOVIET UNION AS THE PRINCIPAL THREAT TO JAPAN. JAPANESE DEFENSE PLANNING, IN TURN, HAS FOUND U.S. SECURITY TREATY, U.S. FORCES IN THE AREA, AND, ULTIMATELY, U.S. NUCLEAR UMBRELLA ONLY PRACTICAL WAY TO CONTEND WITH SOVIET THREAT, ESPECIALLY IN LIGHT OF JAPANESE CONSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS. CONSENSUS IN SUPPORT OF NATIONAL NEED FOR THE JAPAN SELF-DEFENSE FORCES (JSDF) THAT WAS BORN OUT OF THE KOREAN WAR HAS VERY GRADUALLY TAKEN HOLD. FOR MANY YEARS DEFENSE PLANNERS HAVE CONCENTRATED ON THOSE DEFENSE MEASURES WHICH APPEARED LIKELY MOST EASILY TO GAIN PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE, WHILE MAKING A PRACTICAL SECURITY CONTRIBUTION: NAVAL AND AIR ASW AND LOCAL

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AIR DEFENSE.

2. DESPITE DIRE PREDICTIONS A DECADE AGO, MOSTLY IN CIRCLES OUTSIDE JAPAN, JAPAN'S PLANNERS HAVE HAD NO INTEREST IN DEVELOPING AN INDEPENDENT NUCLEAR CAPABILITY-- AND JAPAN HAS NOW RATIFIED THE NPT. THE 1973 OIL EMBARGO GAVE RISE TO MUCH FRUSTRATION IN JAPAN, BUT IF EVENTS HIGHLIGHTED THE VULNERABILITY OF JAPAN'S TANKER PIPELINE, THEY HAVE NOT CAUSED THE JAPANESE LEADERSHIP UP TO THIS TIME TO ADVOCATE A STRONGER NAVY OR OTHER ARMED FORCES AS A SOLUTION TO POTENTIAL PROBLEMS FAR FROM JAPANESE SHORES. IN FACT, MANY CONCLUDED THE OPPOSITE: THAT MILITARY POWER WAS ONLY marginally RELEVANT TO JAPANESE VULNERABILITIES.

3. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND FOLLOWING ADDRESSES QUESTIONS POSED IN PARA 3 REFTEL:

A. EMPHASIS ON IMPROVING JSDF CAPABILITIES IN SEA AND AIR DEFENSE AND INTELLIGENCE MUST BE SEEN IN THE CONTINUUM OF JAPAN'S DEFENSE PLANNING, RATHER THAN AS A REACTION TO RECENT SOVIET NAVAL EXPANSION. TO BE SURE JAPAN'S POLICY MAKERS HAVE POINTED TO INCREASED SOVIET NAVAL STRENGTH TO UNDERSCORE RELEVANCE OF THIS EMPHASIS BUT UNDERLYING RATIONALE IS DESIRE TO DESIGN A BALANCED FORCE MAKING OPTIMUM USE OF AVAILABLE FUNDS AND MANPOWER. CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS ASIDE, JAPAN'S DEFENSE PLANNERS FOR SOME TIME HAVE RECOGNIZED THE NEED TO REDRESS SHORTFALLS IN SHIP CONSTRUCTION AND REPLACE KOREAN WAR-VINTAGE FIGHTER AND PATROL AIRCRAFT. WITHIN THE DEFENSE PLANNING COMMUNITY THERE IS INTEREST AND SOME CONCERN ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF EXPANDING SOVIET NAVAL POWER, BUT EVEN HERE sizeable BODY OF OPINION, WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING SOVIET NAVAL ACTIVITIES AS SIGNIFICANT IN PSYCHOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL TERMS, DOES NOT SEE MAJOR IMPLICATIONS FOR JAPANESE DEFENSE. IN ANY EVENT, NO SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES HAVE SURFACED IN THIS CONTEXT ABOUT JAPAN'S PRESENT AND FUTURE PRIORITY MILITARY NEEDS. MOREOVER, THE DEFENSE POLICY ESTABLISHMENT HAS DISPLAYED REMARKABLE
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DEGREE OF CONSENSUS IN SUPPORTING GOJ ACTIONS THAT REINFORCE NATION'S ESSENTIALLY DEFENSIVE POLICY, E.G., RATIFICATION OF NPT AND REAFFIRMATION OF ONE-PERCENT CEILING ON DEFENSE SPENDING.

B. DESPITE THE INTEREST AND EVEN CONCERN WITH WHICH JAPANESE OFFICIALS HAVE FOLLOWED THE INCREASE IN SOVIET NAVAL ACTIVITY IN NORTHEAST ASIA, THIS

HAS NOT PROMPTED ANY SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF SOVIET INTENTIONS TOWARD HAPAN OR IN ATTITUDES OR POLICIES TOWARDS THE SOVIET UNION. JAPANESE WARINESS TOWARD THE SOVIETS AND THEIR MOTIVES REMAINS, BUT DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE BEEN HEIGHTENED BY SPECIFIC SOVIET NAVAL OPERATIONS. DEFENSE MINISTER SAKATA RECENTLY REMARKED TO SENATOR MANSFIELD THAT HE CONSIDERED INCREASED SOVIET NAVAL DEPLOYMENTS IN EAST ASIA TO BE AN ASPECT OF THE SOVIET EFFORT TO ESTABLISH ITSELF AS A "WORLD POWER." HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THIS DEVELOPMENT CONSTITUTED A "POTENTIAL" BUT MADE CLEAR HE DID NOT CONSIDER THIS POSED AN IMMINENT THREAT TO JAPAN. OTHER GOJ OFFICIALS DO NOT DISCOUNT SOVIET AMBITIONS TO EXPAND THEIR INFLUENCE THROUGHOUT ASIA BUT BELIEVE EMPHASIS WILL BE ON POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FIELDS WITH MILITARY POWER, INCLUDING FLEET OPERATIONS, PLAYING ANCILLARY ROLE. AGGRESSIVE SOVIET FISHING OPERATIONS CLOSE TO JAPAN'S SHORES, ALBEIT IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS, HAVE AROUSED PUBLIC INTEREST MORE THAN SOVIET NAVAL OPERATIONS IN SAME AREA. AS NOTED ABOVE, RECOGNITION OF INCREASING SOVIET NAVAL POWER HAS NOT LED TO A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEWS CONCERNING THE SIZE AND SHAPE OF THE JSDF OR TO HEIGHTENED CONCERN ABOUT A SOVIET MILITARY THREAT TO JAPAN. THIS DEVELOPMENT PROBABLY HAS STRENGTHENED THE WIDESPREAD CONVICTION WITHIN THE JAPANESE DEFENSE COMMUNITY CONCERNING THE ESSENTIALITY OF THE U.S.-JAPAN MUTUAL SECURITY TREATY RELATIONSHIP AND OF THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF U.S. FORCES IN AND AROUND JAPAN TO JAPAN'S BASIC SECURITY INTERESTS. WITHIN THE

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PUBLIC AT LARGE, RECOGNITION OF THE RELEVANCE OF THE MUTUAL SECURITY TREATY TO JAPAN'S DEFENSE NEEDS HAS BEEN GROWING SINCE THE END OF THE WAR IN VIETNAM, AND IT IS POSSIBLE THAT INCREASED AWARENESS OF SOVIET NAVAL POWER IN EAST ASIA MAY HAVE REINFORCED THIS TREND.

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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1729

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 TOKYO 12566

SOVIET NAVAL POWER IS SEEN AS AMONG MANY VULNERABILITIES TO JAPAN, WHICH HAPAN FEELS ON BALANCE CAN STILL BE DEALT WITH CONFIDENCE BECAUSE OF JAPAN'S SECURITY RELATIONSHIP WITH U.S. THIS IS NOT SAY THERE HAVE BEEN NO MISGIVINGS ABOUT REDUCTIONS IN U.S. FORCES IN ASIA, BUT THESE HAVE NOT BEEN SUCH AS TO AFFECT MATERIALLY THE BASIC SET OF JAPAN'S SECURITY POLICY.

C. THERE IS LITTLE INDICATION THAT PERCEPTIONS OF SOVIET NAVAL ACTIVITIES HAVE CHANGED POLICY MAKERS' VIEWS OF BALANCE OF POWER IN REGION OR DESIREABLE COURSE OF RELATIONS AMONG MAJOR POWERS. AS REFTEL POINTS OUT, STABILITY OF KOREAN PENINSULA IS REGARDED AS CRITICAL TO JAPAN'S SECURITY, BUT THIS HAS BEEN HISTORICAL GIVEN FOR THE JAPANESE. SINO-SOVIET RIVALRY OCCASIONALLY MAKES IT DIFFICULT FOR JAPANESE TO FIGURE OUT WHETHER THEY ARE BEING WOODED, THREATENED OR SIMPLY USED, BUT WITHOUT TRYING TO PURSUE ALL THE PERMUTATIONS, SOVIET NAVAL ACTIVITY DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE WEIGHED HEAVILY IN JAPANESE CALCULUS AS THEY ATTEMPT TO SORT OUT POWER POLITICS IN THEIR VICINITY.

AMONG KNOWLEDGEABLE JAPANESE DEFENSE THINKERS THERE ARE SOME WHO QUESTION WHETHER, IN THE LIGHT
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OF INCREASED SOVIET NAVAL POWER, THE U.S. STILL RETAINS CONVENTIONAL MILITARY SUPERIORITY IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC OR WHO ARE CONCERNED THAT A SHIFT

IN THIS DIRECTION MAY BE TAKING PLACE. SUCH DOUBTS ARE REINFORCED BY ASSUMPTIONS THAT, BY CONTRAST WITH THE PERIOD PRIOR TO THE END OF THE VIETNAM WAR, U.S. WILLINGNESS TO COMMIT ITS MILITARY POWER ABROAD IS LESS CERTAIN. IT IS NOT CLEAR TO WHAT EXTENT SUCH DOUBTS AND UNCERTAINTIES ARE SHARED BY POLICY MAKING OFFICIALS WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT. INsofar AS THEIR ATTITUDES CAN BE INFERRED FROM RECENT ACTIONS AND STATEMENTS, BOTH IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE, THERE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN NO SERIOUS DIMINUTION IN THEIR CONFIDENCE IN THE WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY OF THE U.S. TO MAINTAIN ITS STRATEGIC DETERRENT. NOR IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE THAT THESE OFFICIALS HAVE CONCLUDED THAT, EVEN IN CONVENTIONAL TERMS, INCREASED SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE HAS ALTERED, OR THREATENS TO ALTER, THE U.S.-SOVIET MILITARY BALANCE, MOREOVER, INASMUCH AS JAPANESE PERCEIVE POWER BALANCE IN MACRO POLITICAL-ECONOMIC TERMS, NOT MERELY IN ORDER-OF-BATTLE CONTEXT, JAPANESE ANALYSIS WOULD BE AFFECTED MUCH MORE BY A MAJOR SHIFT IN U.S. POLICY. AS MATTERS STAND, IMPORTANCE OF OVER-ALL RELATIONSHIP WITH U.S. REMAINS BASIS FOR JAPAN'S DIPLOMATIC POSTURE TOWARDS BOTH PRC AND USSR.

D. TO A CERTAIN EXTENT, WHATEVER INCREASE THERE HAS BEEN IN PUBLIC ATTENTION TO SOVIET MILITARY ACTIVITY NEAR JAPAN IS ATTRIBUTABLE TO DELIBERATE GOJ (JDA) DECISION TO RELEASE INFORMATION ABOUT SOVIET RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS, PASSAGE OF NAVAL VESSELS, ETC. THE ACTIVITY ITSELF IS NOT NEW BUT APPEARS TO REFLECT SOME INCREASED CONCERN BY DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT, WHICH BELIEVES POLITICAL CLIMATE HAS CHANGED ENOUGH TO PERMIT MUCH FREER AIRING OF DEFENSE MATTERS IN GENERAL. PUBLIC OPINION POLLS, HOWEVER, OFFER LITTLE HELP IN MEASURING POSSIBLE IMPACT OF SOVIET NAVAL BUILD-UP. PERHAPS RECENT POLLS ARE MOST SIGNIFICANT FOR
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THEIR FAILURE TO INCLUDE QUESTIONS RELATING TO SOVIET THREAT. IT IS ALSO OF INTEREST THAT RECENT POLLS HAVE SHOWN SLIGHTLY INCREASED SUPPORT FOR JAPAN'S FREE-WORLD ALIGNMENTS, JSDF AND SECURITY TREATY, AND INCREASED DISLIKE FOR SOVIET UNION.

DEFENSE SPECIALISTS AND ACADEMICS HAVE INDICATED CONSIDERABLE AWARENESS OF THE SOVIET NAVAL BUILD-UP, STIMULATED BY STATEMENTS BY U.S. NAVY OFFICERS THAT U.S. CAN NO LONGER GUARANTEE NAVAL SUPERIORITY

IN REGION AND THAT JAPAN SEA IS A "SOVIET LAKE."
WHILE A SMALL MINORITY OF SPECIALIST OBSERVERS MAY
BELIEVE THAT SOVIET MILITARY POWER HAS FUNDAMENTALLY
ALTERED JAPAN'S SECURITY ENVIRONMENT, MOST
RESERVE THEIR OPINION WHILE OBSERVING SOVIETS
CAREFULLY. THEY ARE ALSO INTERESTED IN HEARING
AUTHORITATIVE U.S. VIEWS ON THIS SUBJECT.

FLURRIES OF ENHANCED MEDIA INTEREST IN SECURITY
MATTERS, E.G., AFTER US WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM,
FOLLOWING PUBLICITY GIVEN SOVIET INTELLIGENCE
GATHERING AND OTHER NAVAL OPERATIONS IN WATERS
CLOSE TO JAPAN, DO NOT IN OUR OBSERVATION REPRESENT
SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE IN COVERAGE OF SECURITY MATTERS,
INCLUDING SOVIET NAVAL ACTIVITY. ANALYSIS OF
SOVIET ACTIVITY HAS TENDED TO STRESS U.S.-SOVIET
COMPETITIVE ASPECTS RATHER THAN IMPLICATIONS FOR
JAPAN. COMMENTARY ACCOMPANYING PUBLICITY NOTED
ABOVE FOR SOVIET NAVAL AND AIR RECONNAISSANCE
NEAR JAPAN GENERALLY CONCLUDED THAT THIS ACTIVITY
REPRESENTED ONLY POTENTIAL THREAT AS LONG AS
SINO-SOVIET CONFRONTATION OCCUPIED MOSCOW.

4. DEPARTMENT PASS TO OTHER POSTS AS DESIRED.
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